

Palm/Passion Sunday B
Poor Peter

March 24, 2024
Mark 14:1-15:47

The passion, that is, the events of Jesus' last days including his suffering and death are recorded in all four gospels. One of the areas of biblical studies is to stare at the parallel accounts side-by-side for hours and hours and note the differences in each of the accounts. Those differences can indicate emphases that the writer is making. They can also give hints as to differences in the audiences each writer is addressing.

Mark's version of the passion has some differences about Peter that aren't found in the other accounts. All four accounts report that Peter denied knowing Jesus. All four tell us that Jesus warned Peter about this.

The Gospel of Mark includes little details that makes Peter seem even worse than in the other gospels. It's only in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus telling Peter: "Before the cock crows **twice** you will deny me three times." The other gospels only have the cock crowing once. I'll say more about this later.

In Mark the servant girl speaks only to Peter. He seems only to be denying Jesus before her. In the other gospels, his denial is before the crowd who could turn against him. In Mark he denies Jesus before a single slave girl.

Peter stated earlier that he was willing to die with Jesus. Now he's embarrassed to even know Jesus in front of a servant girl.

Then Mark tells us: "A cock crowed." Only Mark says that after the first denial.

How dense was Peter not to remember Jesus' words about the cock crowing? He denies knowing Jesus two more times.

We know that Peter had a special relationship with Jesus. In the first chapter of Mark, he is always called, "Simon." Then, in chapter three, Jesus gives him the nickname, "Peter," which sounds like the Greek word for "Rock". Matthew tells us that Peter will become the rock on which Jesus builds his church. That's not in Mark. Rather, we might wonder if Jesus considered him to be as dense as a rock – at least as Mark tells us about him. He doesn't recognize the significance when the cock crowed the first time. He is dense. Peter is a very poor follower of Jesus.

It's a bit like a story by Mark Allan Powell in *Loving Jesus*, about a young adult who professes that he is willing to die for Jesus; but he doesn't attend worship services. He considers them boring. Attending worship, even if it is boring, is a lot less painful than dying.

We are poor Peter. We are disciples of Jesus, yet we have been known to say the wrong things at times and do the wrong things at times. We are not always so forthright in sharing our faith in Jesus. We fear what other people might think or do. We often think more about ourselves than we think about Jesus.

Even when we know better, when we might have heard the cock crow the first time, we often don't change our ways. We're more concerned about preserving our lives and avoiding harassment because of our faith than we are about standing up for and speaking about Jesus.

It's likely that we all have failed Jesus just like Peter did. We deny our relationship with Jesus through our words and our actions. The story doesn't end with Peter breaking down and weeping when he recognizes his denials after the second cock crow.

The ending of Mark also includes Peter in a way not found in the other gospels. When the women find the empty tomb, they see a young man in a white robe who tells them:

“Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples **and Peter** that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”¹

Only Mark includes, “and Peter.” Even though Peter denied knowing Jesus, Jesus will not deny knowing Peter. Even though Peter couldn’t keep his promise to Jesus, Jesus will keep his promise to Peter. He will see him again in Galilee.

We are poor Peter, but Jesus remains our faithful savior. We deny Jesus. He doesn’t deny us. We break our promises and commitments to Jesus. Jesus keeps his promises to us. Jesus sticks by us even when we might want to push him away.

We may be poor disciples like Peter, but we know that we have a faithful savior like Peter did. Peter, perhaps even as dense as he was, becomes the head of the church – a church that Christ created for the gathering of poor disciples to again hear God’s promises, to be forgiven, and to be empowered to go out and be witnesses to the grace of God given to us and to all people in Jesus.

¹ Mark 16:6-7